



Organisation Mondiale pour L'Éducation Préscolaire
World Organization for Early Childhood Education
Organización Mundial para la Educación Preescolar

Giving Every Child a Chance: Building Just, Resilient and Peaceful Societies Through Social Protection and Early Childhood Care and Education

Social protection is a cornerstone of human rights. It is essential for reducing poverty and inequality and for promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth—even in times of crisis. The **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** guarantees that social protection systems must prioritize the needs of young children and their families (Art. 26), and affirms children's **right to life, to full development, and to thrive**.

This right to full development demands comprehensive public policies from birth, including **Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)** an essential and integral part of the right to education. ECCE and social protection together form the foundation of **equity, justice and human wellbeing**.

Children under 18 represent **30% of humanity**, yet they are disproportionately affected by today's overlapping crises—climate change, forced displacement, conflict, poverty, trafficking, gender-based violence and health emergencies. The data is shocking and still incomplete: more than **200 million children under 5** lack a birth certificate, are stateless, invisible and are excluded from accessing basic services; **900 million** experience multidimensional poverty, lacking food, water, shelter, education and healthcare; **421 million** live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than \$3 per day; **250 million** are out of school; and **over 460 million** are affected by conflict. As of mid-2024, **48.8 million children were forcibly displaced**—a record high.

The current **polycrisis**, with its unprecedented threats to peace, security and social cohesion, demands **systemic transformation**, sustained investment and bold intersectoral action. Social protection must help families manage economic shocks, ensure access to health, including mental health, and nutrition, strengthen caregiving environments, and guarantee opportunities for quality early childhood education and care.

Scientific evidence is unequivocal: exposure to **toxic stress in early childhood**, particularly in the first 1,000 days, has severe and lasting impacts on health,

learning, emotional wellbeing and social participation. These harms extend across communities and generations. Conversely, when young children grow up in safe and nurturing environments, they can **thrive, and contribute to peaceful, cohesive societies**. ECCE is particularly beneficial for children in crisis situations where danger, instability and insecurity affect families, communities and societies.

States are obliged under international human rights law to prevent harm and protect all individuals.

Yet a major global gap persists: **1.5 billion children under 15** currently have **no access to social protection**. The absence of comprehensive family-support programs, so crucial for women and girls, **and universal child benefits** leaves millions of families without essential assistance during the most critical years for development. This undermines children's rights and deepens inequalities.

Evidence shows that **Universal Child Benefits (UCBs)** improve health and nutrition, increase school attendance, reduce chronic malnutrition, child mortality, child marriage and child labor, and strengthen household resilience. Countries with established child benefits were able to react quickly during the COVID-19 crisis, demonstrating the importance of having strong systems in place before emergencies occur.

To achieve universal social protection, policymakers must adopt a **comprehensive, child-centered and rights-based approach**, recognizing that children's rights are indivisible, interdependent and interconnected across protection, education, health, nutrition and care.

The **Second World Summit for Social Development** (Doha, November 4-6, 2025) renewed global commitments to social justice, inclusion and equity for all; the **G20 South Africa Summit Leaders' Declaration (Johannesburg, 22-23 November 2025)** reaffirmed the commitment to support migrants and refugees, the need to act in accordance international humanitarian law and ensure that **no one is left behind**.

These commitments are an important step forward, but they must translate into **binding frameworks, measurable indicators and sustained financing** at national and global levels. The upcoming **International Financing Summit for Early Childhood (2027)** will further confirm that early childhood interventions are not merely social spending—they are essential investments in human rights, equality and the future of our societies.

In the current global context, **hesitation is not an option. The future of our societies rests on the attention, protection and opportunities we give to young children, especially those living in crisis, conflict, displacement and poverty.**

We know what works. We know what is right. We have to act now.

